

Remarks on Independence Day at Patuxent River Naval Air Station,
Maryland
July 4, 1996

Thank you very much. First of all, Admiral Newsome, thank you for welcoming us, and thank you for the fine work that you and your colleagues do here every day to make our country stronger in so many ways.

Congressman Hoyer, thank you for your leadership, thank you for being with us today on Independence Day and for what you do every day for this district and for our Nation.

I'd like to say a special word of thanks to Craig Koppie, who saved both of our lives out there when the eagle got a little nervous—[laughter]—she wanted to be free even more than we wanted to free her, I think—[laughter]—and to Jamie Clark and to all those here who work to conserve our Nation's treasures.

We have Federal employees here. We have some State employees here from Maryland who are devoting their careers to preserving our environment, our natural resources, and our precious species. And I'd like to ask all the rest of us on this Independence Day to thank them for what they do for America. [Applause] Thank you very, very much.

I want to thank all the people who are here from the Department of the Interior. I see Deputy Secretary Garamendi, and there are many others here from the Interior Department. We've seeded this crowd today.

And I want to say a special word of thanks to Bruce Babbitt. We have fought in many ways to try to make sure that America would enhance the quality of its environment and enhance the diversity and strength of its natural resources as we continue to grow the economy and move into the 21st century. I said when I sought this position in 1992 that I did not believe that we could march into the 21st century and leave our children and grandchildren the legacy they deserved unless we found a way to grow the American economy and preserve the environment, enhance our natural resources. Bruce Babbitt has been the point person in that endeavor. He has certainly endured more personal attacks for standing up for America's environment and for our natural resources than any other member of this administration. He has fought a long and sometimes lonely battle. But

in the last year we have seen the American people clearly adopting the position we have fought for all along. They know that America's future depends upon the preservation of our natural resources. And that will be Bruce Babbitt's enduring legacy. I am very grateful to him, and I know all Americans are.

I want to thank the State officials from Maryland who are here, including Maryland State Treasurer Richard Dixon and Senator Mike Miller, the president of the Maryland Senate; and other senators and delegates who are here; and people from Saint Mary's County, the county commissioners who are here. I thank all of them for coming. I thank John Griffin, the secretary of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

And I'd like to ask, since Jamie recognized them, I'd like to ask Mollie Beattie's aunt and uncle to please be recognized: Herb and Michelle Morris. Would you all stand up and be recognized? Thank you so much for being here today. [Applause] Thank you.

I want to say a few words about Independence Day and American eagles, but before I do, I'd like to take just a moment on our Independence Day to celebrate and applaud the freedom and independence exercised yesterday in another part of the world. As people who cherish the right to choose our leaders and have a say in our Nation's destiny, we should take just a moment on our Independence Day and reflect on what happened in Russia yesterday.

When I was a boy growing up, it would have been unthinkable that in just a few decades the Soviet empire would be no more, the Soviet Union would be a collection of independent countries, and the great Russia would be a free country with free elections.

Millions and millions of Russians, well over 60 percent of the eligible voters, returned to the polls yesterday and cast a free and open vote for Russia's democratic future. This is a historic achievement. The Russian people have turned their back on tyranny; they are turning the corner toward freedom. They and their leaders have cleared another important hurdle in building a new and enduring democracy.

While the final results have not yet been announced, it is clear that a majority, a substantial majority of the Russian people, voted for President Yeltsin and for the path of reform. I want to congratulate President Yeltsin on his reelection—has a nice ring to it. [Laughter] I want to congratulate the Russian people most of all on this milestone. They have been consistent in being good citizens, turning out in these elections, and showing that they are fully capable of exercising the powers of democracy.

So as we celebrate our freedom and independence, we applaud them for their freedom and independence as well. That bodes very good news for the future of the entire world as we move together into a new century.

I think it is altogether appropriate for us to begin the celebration of our democracy on the Fourth of July with the celebration of the rebirth of our national symbol. After our Nation was founded two centuries and two decades ago, the Founders chose the bald eagle to represent all that America stands for. The American President has always carried that symbol everywhere, as I have here today.

Since Secretary Babbitt mentioned it, and since Benjamin Franklin had such a good sense of humor, I'm sure he would be amused to know that many people identify those of us in public life with turkeys as often as eagles, I think. [Laughter]

On our first Independence Day—listen to this—on our first Independence Day, as many as a quarter-million bald eagles soared over what is now the continental United States. Those eagles seemed as enduring as the strength, the unity, the justice, and the freedom upon which our Nation was founded. And so it didn't seem to matter much in the beginning and for a long time that their treetop habitat was destroyed and that they were shot down from the sky.

But Thomas Jefferson warned Americans about our environment. He wrote, "For if one link in nature's chain might be lost, another might be lost, until the whole of things will vanish by piecemeal." The bald eagle, the symbol of Jefferson's words in our Declaration of Independence, became a symbol of his warnings as well. They became the victims of vanishing forests and poisonous pesticides. And 25 years ago there remained only 400 pairs of bald eagles in the lower 48 States. Our noble bird was dying off.

That made our country take a good look at itself. We saw our dirty lakes and streams, and we began to clean them. We saw soot and began to remove it and other dangerous particles from the air. We saw waste sites bordering places where families live and children go to school, and we began the work of removing hazards from our soil. We banned DDT, and both parties came together to pass the Endangered Species Act. Because America made this commitment to work together, we began to make our environment whole. We renewed our compact with nature.

On this Independence Day let me say to all Americans, we must not do anything that would weaken our health and safety and environmental laws. The freedom to breathe clean air, drink safe water, pass a safe world to our children, to share our environment with God's other creatures, these are liberties we dare not take for granted and we dare not turn our back on. Let us rededicate ourselves to our common, non-partisan American commitment to preserve the environment.

Though human deeds almost erased America's symbol from our skies, human wisdom and good sense brought it back. Now the time of the bald eagle has come again. Now more than 4,500 bald eagle pairs nest in our lower 48 States.

Two years ago Mollie Beattie, who was the first woman to serve as the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, released a bald eagle to mark a milestone in its reverse. The bald eagle was being officially reclassified from endangered to threatened. Last week Mollie Beattie passed away much too soon. But she left us an enduring legacy of passion for our Earth and its creatures which she instilled in all who were fortunate enough to know her.

The bald eagle you saw a few minutes ago has been captive while it was nursed back from a fractured shoulder. And you heard Craig say when we released it that the bald eagle was named in honor of Mollie Beattie. And in her honor today I say, let us all, on Independence Day, rededicate ourselves to the preservation of this wonderful land and these wonderful creatures which God has given.

Thank you, and God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:18 a.m. at the Goose Creek Bridge. In his remarks, he referred to Rear Adm. Mary Newsome, Commander,

Naval Air Warfare Center; Craig Koppie, biologist, and Jamie Clark, Assistant Director for Ecological Services, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and President Boris Yeltsin of Russia.

Remarks at an Independence Day Celebration in Youngstown, Ohio July 4, 1996

Thank you. What a beautiful day. I am so glad to see this great crowd here. I want to thank Clare Maluso—excuse me, I’m having a little trouble with my voice, but I hope you can hear me back there. I want to thank Clare Maluso for doing such a fine job with this event. I want to thank Mayor Ungaro and the other members of the city council who are here. I want to thank Congressman Traficant for what he said and for the work he does for you in Washington every day. I want to thank the other officials who are here, the members of the county commission, especially David Engler, who’s pled your case to me on so many occasions.

I want to thank this wonderful choir for getting us off to a good start. Weren’t they great? *[Applause]* Thank you.

Reverend Powell, you are the best looking 94-year-old woman in the world. I was told before we came out here that her husband was a steelworker so long ago that he started working at 15 cents an hour. So she’s seen a lot of things happen in this community. And hearing her optimism and her hope for the future should be encouraging to all of us.

I wish that Hillary were here with me today, but she’s representing our country—*[applause]*—thank you. She is representing our country in visiting on our day of freedom a lot of the countries in Central and Eastern Europe that used to be dominated by communism that themselves are now free. And they invited her to come for this week, and I think it’s a good thing to be doing.

Somebody joked with me—I don’t know if any of you have seen this new movie “Independence Day”—but somebody said I was coming to Youngstown because this is the day the White House got blown away by space aliens. *[Laughter]* I hope it’s there when I get back. *[Laughter]* Anyway, I recommend the movie. I got a chance to see it the other night.

The last time I came here—the Congressman referred to it—it was in 1992, and I almost

broke up a wedding party. Our bus caravan literally ran into the wedding of Judy and Mario Riccardi. And I was so impressed by them, and I thought she was such a beautiful bride and he was such a lucky fellow, that I invited them to get up on stage at our rally. And they did. And I was just trying to sort of help the marriage get off to a good start. That was 4 years ago, and since then they’ve had one child, and another one’s on the way. So I hope that our campaign made some contribution to it. I understand they’re here. Would they stand up. You all stand up. Give them a hand. *[Applause]* Thank you. Bless you.

I also had an opportunity to see a lot of folks from Youngstown last year when you brought your national championship football team down, and I enjoyed that. And they’ll be back.

I wish I could stay all day and stay through the evening and see the fireworks display that I know Bruce Zoldan’s going to do. But I just want to thank you for giving me a chance to be a small part of your bicentennial.

This is a day where all Americans put aside their business and their political preconceptions and just celebrate the freedom of our country, a day for family and friends, for softball and barbecue and music, a day to remember that even though we sometimes take the blessings of liberty for granted, millions of people around the world would give anything to share them. So I wanted to share with you my feelings about some joyous news a long way around the world.

Yesterday the Russian people went back to the polls in a free and fair election. They had an election; then they had a runoff. And it was the second election. That is, they had once elected a President, and now we were going to see if democracy would take in a country that was so long dominated by Communists, and before that by the czars. With a decisive voice, the Russian people chose democracy.